

Please Note: these minutes are pending Board approval.
Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on April 18, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 3 Primrose Street.

D. Zukowski, Chair	C. Melillo
J. Vouros, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Ramsey, Secretary	T. Vadas
D. Cruson	4 Staff
J. Kuzma	14 Public
J. Larkin	1 Press
A. Plante	
K. Kunzweiler (excused)	
D. Godino (excused)	

Ms. Zukowski called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m.

Item 1 – Executive Session

MOTION: Mrs. Larkin moved that the Board of Education go into executive session to discuss confidential attorney/client privileged material in regards to Board policy and invite Mr. Melillo and Attorney Dori Antonetti. Mrs. Kuzma seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 2 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 3 – Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mrs. Larkin moved that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda which includes the donation to Newtown High School and the correspondence report. Mrs. Kuzma seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 4 – Public Participation

Item 5 – Reports

Chair Report: Ms. Zukowski reported that the book challenge process outlined in Policy 8-302 will be discussed by the Special Review Committee this Thursday, April 20 at 10:30 a.m. The committee is presenting their report to the Board at the May 2 meeting to be considered by the members.

Superintendent's Report: Mr. Melillo stated he would participate in the Lacrosse golf tournament this Sunday. We had our final meeting with the Legislative Council regarding our budget adjustments and expressed pride in his team for developing this budget. It was reduced by \$450,000 and we will work to allocate a budget that is in the best interest of our students. He looks forward to the community support.

Committee reports:

Mrs. Larkin reported on the CFF Committee meeting last night. The Director of Facilities interview phase is complete and expects to move to an offer this week. Our new Hawley project manager also provided an update. Regarding transportation we are looking good with drivers and will have spare drivers starting also. The Transportation Committee is still talking about contingency plans if needed.

Student Reports:

Dr. Longobucco read the students' report which noted that AP testing begins in two weeks and spring sports are in full spring with baseball, lacrosse, softball and tennis seeing great success in early competition. The annual "Senior Assassins" game is underway with students scheming

to win the cash prize. This past week was filled with college commitments as seniors finalize their decisions.

Financial Report:

MOTION: Mrs. Larkin Moved that the Board of Education approve the financial report and transfers for the month ending March 31, 2023. Mrs. Plante seconded.

Mrs. Vadas presented the financial report.

Motion passes unanimously.

Grants and Funding Updates:

Judy DeStefano joined Mrs. Vadas and gave an overview on grants.

Mr. Ramsey asked how many grants from the level of a teacher or staff member are used for innovative programs.

Mrs. DeStefano reported that she has received calls from the teachers and makes a note of what they are looking for to meet their needs.

Mr. Ramsey referred to the Perkins Grant and asked if that was for staff for innovative programs and equipment.

Mrs. DeStefano said teachers need to have certain certifications to be eligible for the classroom grants and part of it has to pay for professional development and travel if necessary.

Ms. Zukowski asked which competitive grants imply funding from the budget. She also asked about the art request from the borough and the amount.

Mrs. DeStefano said her initial request changed to \$40,000. She was hoping to get funding from Novo up to \$80,000 but was not sure how it will work out. There are no other positions being created from grants. Some grants are just for new positions. The Teen Talk counselor we are hoping to move to a grant for next year and possibly the fourth year. The counselor is more of a crisis interventionist counselor. They also work in the classroom with teachers and students struggling to attend school.

Item 6 – Presentations

Integrated Physical and Earth Science Presentation:

Fawn Georgina, the course teacher, and Chris Canfield, Department Chair, spoke about this curriculum.

Mrs. Plante inquired what grade level this course was offered to and was told it was for grade nine students but we also get a few sophomores.

Mrs. Plante also asked the number of students taking this course and was told there were ten sections with between 240 and 250 students.

Ms. Zukowski asked if all ninth graders took this course.

Ms. Georgina said that some advanced students skip to biology.

Mr. Ramsey asked if they got involved in food sustainability and supply chains to which

Ms. Georgina stated that they got into waste management and food sustainability.

Mr. Ramsey also asked if they ever work with the culinary department.

Ms. Georgina stated they did and have tapped trees on campus for maple syrup and also planted fruit trees.

Item 7 – Old BusinessStrategic Plan Update:

Dr. Richard Lemons presented an overview of what the committee has accomplished so far and spoke about the various focus groups. He also spoke about the survey participants and questions. The four strategic priorities that emerged include #1 to ensure stimulating, engaging and challenging learning opportunities tailored to the individual needs of students, #2 prepare students life beyond graduation, #3 retain, develop and diversify faculty and staff, and #4 ensure organizational excellence.

Mr. Ramsey referred to Priority #2 as sees it as the real purpose we have schools. He asked that such things as what we do in life, curiosity, and self-actualization be made more tangible in the plan.

Dr. Lemons said those sentiments don't come up that much in the survey but have come up in the planning committee multiple times. This could also emerge in working on the profile of a graduate.

Mr. Cruson noted that in Priority #3 he didn't see anything about the diversification of learning materials.

Dr. Lemons said those who mentioned it wanted students to see other things besides the teachers.

Mrs. Plante asked that regarding the survey how would we improve on these things and felt it was exciting to see what comes next.

Dr. Lemons said this creates where the district is going. We want a clear articulation of how the schools use this during different parts of the year.

Mrs. Larkin didn't see all of the data fitting in here but saw things we should explore and things that were concerning, but had opportunities. When the time is right, we might put some of that on the back burner but revisit and consider the stakeholder input.

Mr. Melillo noted that we want to make sure we create something we can actually leverage. As a committee we are going to try to find the buckets we were talking about and use the data to be better. There's information around special education and how we run our schools and how we communicate.

Ms. Zukowski asked for clarification on the six different focus groups for middle and high school students.

Dr. Lemons said there were 8 to 12 in the student focus group, 5 to 8 educators in their group, and there were three parent focus groups with a few dozen participants. We had six meetings with designated schools.

Ms. Zukowski asked the makeup of the committee.

Mr. Melillo stated there were two Board members, six administrators, five teachers and a couple of paras and clerks, and there were no parents other than those who were staff members.

Mr. Lemons stated that by the end of June we will provide a strategic plan with priorities and the work needed, portrait of a graduate, core values, and what continuous improvement would be for the district. He also spoke about their discussions regarding the portrait of the graduate which many school districts are discussing. They have also have had conversations around the Newtown core values.

Policy 5114 Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process:

MOTION: Mrs. Larkin moved that the Board of Education approve the Policy 5114

Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process. Mrs. Plante seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Chemistry (CPA Honors) Curriculum:

MOTION: Mrs. Larkin moved that the Board of Education approve the Chemistry (CPA Honors) Curriculum. Mrs. Plante seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Multivariable Calculus Curriculum:

MOTION: Mrs. Larkin moved that the Board of Education approve the Multivariable Calculus Curriculum. Mrs. Plante seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 8 – New Business

MOTION: Mrs. Larkin moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of April 4, 2023. Mrs. Plante seconded.

Ms. Zukowski moved to amend the minutes of March 21, 2023 to replace the words “banning the book” and “banning books” with “the book challenges.” Mrs. Larkin seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Vote on amended minutes: Passes unanimously.

Ms. Zukowski spoke about the updated structure of the minutes. Discussions related to the Board are recorded exceptionally well but the issue at hand is how to best represent public comments. Since every meeting is recorded, we will be providing a link to access the recording along with names and addresses of the speakers and an overall topic. This is an attempt to ensure the accuracy of the comments.

Item 9 – Public Participation

Please click [here](#) to view the public participation.

Joseph Crosby, 5 Blanches Walk, spoke about book challenges.

Jennifer Nicoletti, 68 Totem Trail, spoke about book challenges.

Sayward Parsons, 10 Checkerberry Lane, spoke about book challenges.

Jacqui Kaplan, 34 Osborne Hill Road, Newtown High School English teacher spoke about student learning and book challenges.

Jack Tanner, 13 Dodgingtown Road, thanked the Board for their service and addressed book challenges.

Connie Hoover, 13 Todds Road, addressed book challenges.

Kristin English, 28 Gisella Road, Trumbull, Newtown High School English teacher, spoke about student learning and book challenges.

MOTION: Mr. Vouros moved to adjourn. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 10 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Donald Ramsey
Secretary